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The Impact of Social Media on the Increase of Political Propaganda in the Kurdistan Region – Iraq

Graduation Project Document Submitted to Department of Media as Partial
Fulfillment for the Requirements for the Degree of B.Sc. in Media Science

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Abstract

The study, titled The Impact of Social Media on the Increase of Political Propaganda in the Kurdistan Region – Iraq. Main Objective To analyze and evaluate the impact of social media on the increase of political propaganda in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. with a number of other objectives such as To analyze the methods of using social media platforms for political propaganda. And To identify the types and techniques of propaganda that are spread through social media. Also To evaluate the impact of political propaganda on public opinion and political participation. The study used a descriptive-analytical method. The research community includes all the students of the University of Erbil who continue their academic studies in different colleges and stages, and the sample of the research is the individuals who participated in the research and are representative of the majority of the research community, so the sample of this study is the students of the College of Arts, Medicine, Law, Language, and Engineering. In collecting the data, a survey form was used, which consists of 100 forms and is divided into research samples. Ultimately, a number of goals have been achieved According to the data, Instagram is the most widely used platform among the research participants and 52% of the participants use social media on a daily basis also Most of the participants, about 40%, are exposed to political content on social media and According to the findings, most participants do not engage with posts that contain political content, with 40% of the participants responding. 45% of the participants believe that exposure to political content on social media has influenced their political opinions.

Keywords (Social Media, Political Propaganda, Kurdistan Region – Iraq)

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Chapter One: Introductions

Chapter One: Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of modern communication, revolutionizing the way people connect, share information, and engage with one another. In recent years, its influence has expanded significantly, particularly in the political sphere. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others have gained widespread popularity, offering a space for political discourse, activism, and mobilization. However, with this rise in digital communication comes an increase in the use of social media for political propaganda. Political propaganda refers to the deliberate dissemination of information—whether true or false with the aim of influencing public opinion and gaining political support..

The first part is a general framework of the research that includes the dimensions of the research, the research problem, the importance of the research, the research objective, the research questions.

The second part of the theoretical aspect of the study is based on three themes: the 2. 1 Previous Studies 2.2 Political Propaganda and Topic 2.3 Social Media and Topic 2.4 Hard News and Misinformation in Social Media and Topic 2.5 The Use of Social Media in Political Campaigns and Topic 2.6 The Role of Social Media Influencers in Political Propaganda..

The third part of the research methodology and the fourth part of the research are field aspects, which consists of one theme, which discusses the analysis of tables and survey forms, and the fifth part of the research refers to the results, recommendations and appendices.

1. Background Information

1.1 Problem Statement

In recent years, the use of social media for political connections in the Kurdistan Region has increased, and it has become a major factor in the spread of political propaganda, which can often manipulate public opinion. Political figures have utilized social media platforms to further their agendas, spread misinformation, and amplify political divisions.

Despite this, there is limited research on the subject and the impact of social media on the increase of political propaganda in Kurdistan. Therefore, the issue of this study is focused on understanding the influence of social media on the rise of political propaganda in the Kurdistan Region.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How has social media become a platform for spreading political propaganda in the Kurdistan Region?
2. Which social media platforms are most commonly used for propaganda?
3. How do different political groups use social media platforms to spread their messages?
4. To what extent does political propaganda affect public trust and political engagement?
5. What role do fake news and misinformation play in shaping political opinions through social media?

1.3 Objective

Main Objective:

To analyze and evaluate the impact of social media on the increase of political propaganda in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Sub Objects:

1. To analyze the methods of using social media platforms for political propaganda.
2. To identify the types and techniques of propaganda that are spread through social media.
3. To evaluate the impact of political propaganda on public opinion and political participation.
4. To identify which social media platforms are most commonly used for political propaganda in the Kurdistan Region.
5. To investigate how political figures use social media in their campaigns.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Investigating the ease of social media in spreading political propaganda, identifying the impact of digital political campaigns on public trust and political awareness, the role of fake news and misinformation in influencing voters' opinions, and analyzing the ethical concerns of political propaganda on social media.

1.5 Concept

1.5.1 Social Media : Social media are web-based platforms that allow individuals to create public or semi-public profiles, connect with others, and share content within a bounded system (Boyd and Ellison, 2007: 211).

Social media refers to a group of internet-based applications that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content, facilitating interaction and networking (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: 2).

1.5.2 Political propaganda: is the strategic use of biased information to influence public opinion and support political agendas (Jowett, 2012: 3)

is a form of communication that aims to manipulate public perception and behavior by spreading biased or misleading information, often with the intention of controlling political narratives or gaining support for a political cause (Ellul, 1973: 10).

1.5.3 Kurdistan Region – Iraq: is an autonomous region in northern Iraq, governed by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), with its own parliament, military force (Peshmerga), and official institutions, recognized by the Iraqi constitution under Article 121 (Bengio, 2012).

is a politically and economically distinct federal entity within Iraq, consisting of the provinces of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Duhok, with a semi-independent governance structure and control over internal security and economic affairs (Ghareeb & Dougherty, 2014).

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The first part is a general framework of the research that includes the dimensions of the research, the research problem, the importance of the research, the research objective, the research questions.

The second part of the theoretical aspect of the study is based on three themes: the 2. 1 Previous Studies 2.2 Political Propaganda and Topic 2.3 Social Media and Topic 2.4 Hard News and Misinformation in Social Media and Topic 2.5 The Use of Social Media in Political Campaigns and Topic 2.6 The Role of Social Media Influencers in Political Propaganda..

The third part of the research methodology and the fourth part of the research are field aspects, which consists of one theme, which discusses the analysis of tables and survey forms, and the fifth part of the research refers to the results, recommendations and appendices.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Survey of Existing Literature

1. Mahmood Othman Mahmood (2024) Media Representation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region during the Referendum: A Linguistic Analysis

This study conducted a linguistic analysis of the media representation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region during the Kurdistan Referendum on September 25, 2017. The research aimed to bridge two methodologies:

corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis. By examining how the media portrayed the Iraqi Kurdistan Region during the referendum, this study shed light on the linguistic dimensions of media coverage and the issues surrounding the referendum. Data were collected from six different news sites worldwide and analysed using corpus tools through AntConc.

The findings showed that Western media outlets in the United Kingdom and the United States, including BBC News, CNN, Fox News, and Sky News, represented the Iraqi Kurdistan Region Referendum negatively. In contrast, Rudaw, a local media channel in Iraq's Kurdistan Region, provided a completely positive portrayal, while Al Jazeera maintained an unbiased attitude.

2. Jiyan Faris (2023) The Impact of Advertisers on Media and Journalism in Transitional Democracies: The Case of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

this study expands the literature on media capture not only by examining how state actors and dominant political parties control the advertising sector in a transitional democracy such as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq but also by exploring the (in)direct impact of various social actors, including corporations, political candidates in election periods, and international nongovernmental organizations.

It reports on the findings from 19 in-depth interviews with media professionals and officials from media regulatory authorities. The findings show that advertisers are driven not only by the motivation to influence media content but also by economic interests, such as the colonization of state resources, personal gain, and crony capitalism.

The research conclude by discussing how precarious socioeconomic conditions lead media professionals to develop informal networks with advertisers in turn, allowing powerful social actors to use advertising for either capturing news media or expanding their networks with authorities—and how this impacts on journalism practice.

2.2 Political Propaganda

2.2.1 The Concept of Propaganda

Definition of Propaganda:

Propaganda ranges from subtle to highly systematic efforts to manipulate people's beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors through various symbols (such as words, gestures, slogans, environments, music, clothing, logos, hairstyle, coin designs, postage stamps, etc.). With a strong and intentional focus on influence, propaganda sets itself apart from ordinary communication or the free exchange of ideas. Propagandists have a clear goal or a set of objectives. To achieve these, they carefully select facts, arguments, and symbolic representations, presenting them in a way they believe will have the greatest impact. To maximize effectiveness, they may omit relevant truths, distort information, or even outright lie. They might also attempt to divert the audience's attention from everything except their propaganda. (Smith, 2024)

Propaganda is the dissemination of information—whether truth, arguments, rumors, half-truths, or lies—with the intent of influencing public opinion. With a deliberate and strong emphasis on manipulation, propaganda differs from ordinary discussion or free exchange of ideas. (Researcher)

Types of Propaganda

Propaganda can be categorized into three main types: white, grey, and black propaganda.

White Propaganda: White propaganda primarily includes activities related to public relations and marketing. It involves delivering a message from a known and credible source. For example, when a PR representative releases news about a local bank donating \$100,000 to a local hospital, both the hospital and the bank are clearly identified in the news report. The message is presented with a degree of transparency and reliability, even if the underlying intent is to shape public perception. The hospital and the bank benefit from the positive publicity and the trust of the community, making this a relatively open and strategic form of propaganda.

Grey Propaganda: Grey propaganda involves communication where the source is either uncertain or deliberately ambiguous. While the message itself may come from a known figure, its original source remains unclear. In international politics, grey propaganda can manifest as spreading news through foreign media outlets rather than directly purchasing advertisements. This method increases the credibility of the message, as people tend to trust information they come across indirectly rather than from a direct appeal from an adversary.

Black Propaganda: Black propaganda deliberately conceals the identity of the message's source, often distorting information to manipulate the audience. It is commonly used to misattribute an inflammatory message to a hostile source, inciting anger and resentment against them. Alternatively, it can be used to undermine trust in an individual or organization or to subtly guide public perception in favor of the propagandist. Unlike white and grey propaganda, black propaganda almost always involves deception and unethical tactics. (Broadford, 2023)

2.2.2 Definitions of Political Propaganda

Definition of Political Propaganda:

Political propaganda is a systematic effort to influence people's opinions and attitudes with the aim of achieving a specific political goal. (Ibrahim Abdulrahman Hamdi, 2014).

Another Perspective on Political Propaganda Political propaganda consists of a set of methods used by an organized group to actively engage individuals within society, either consciously or unconsciously, in supporting the group's actions. (Jacques Ellul, 2020)

Additionally, political propaganda often involves false or misleading information intentionally spread to harm or promote a political cause. If we examine the nature of misinformation and disinformation, we can better understand propaganda, as it is a form of manipulated information designed to shape public perception. (Elric, 2024).

Characteristics of Political Propaganda

Political propaganda primarily revolves around fear, uncertainty, and instability in its audience. Modern governments in Poland and Hungary use political propaganda to instill fear in their citizens and create an "us vs. them" mentality. Migrants, the LGBTQ+ community, human rights groups, environmental activists, and even the European Union itself are portrayed as external threats aiming to harm the nation, while the government positions itself as the people's protector. This approach mirrors propaganda tactics used throughout history, from Nazi Germany to the

Soviet Union and beyond. (EU, 2024).

Political propaganda often targets deep-seated fears and anxieties that most people inherently have. When individuals feel threatened—whether due to religious concerns, personal security, cultural traditions, or economic stability—they are more likely to support leaders who claim to safeguard their way of life. Over time, this fear-driven approach shifts public opinion toward supporting authoritarian policies, as people become convinced of imminent threats and are willing to trade certain freedoms for government protection. Another key aspect of propaganda is its emotional appeal. The “threats” created by propagandists are often exaggerated or completely fabricated to provoke strong emotional reactions. For example, the idea that a same-sex couple moving into your neighborhood could somehow ruin your life is baseless. However, when such narratives are reinforced through friendly media channels and widely disseminated on social media without being challenged effectively they can become deeply ingrained in public perception, making them easier to believe and harder to refute ((Elric, 2024).

2.3 Social Media:

Definition of Social Media: Social media refers to platforms and applications that facilitate easy communication between people worldwide. This is achieved through activities such as posting, chatting, or engaging via voice and video interactions. The primary goal of social media is to foster communication between individuals and communities globally, enhancing connections, sharing activities, and engaging with others through these platforms. The ability to share content like images, videos, and news has transformed our way of life, providing new means of enhancing many of our daily tasks. (Sanjari, 2023)

Social media, from a linguistic perspective, translates to “social media” or “people’s media.” Directly, users can interact with various posts and share information within the confines of systems, laws, and guidelines specific to each platform. It allows users to freely express their opinions and ideas while utilizing the platform’s services in the easiest and most accessible way possible. (Kawani, 2022)

The Most Popular Social Media Platforms of Our Time:

Facebook: Facebook, a social network launched in 2004 by its founder Mark Zuckerberg, has continuously developed and become one of the largest companies in the world. It allows users to share photos, posts, comments, and both local and international news, in addition to offering chat features, games, and live video streaming. By the end of 2018, Facebook had nearly 2.32 billion users globally, and the platform continues to grow and expand.

Messenger: Initially a feature for sending messages within the Facebook app, Messenger became a standalone app in 2011 and continues to grow in popularity with more advanced features. Today, businesses can use Messenger to send promotional messages, communicate with customers, and share news and updates.

YouTube: Founded in 2005 by Jawed Karim, Steven Chen, and Chad Hurley, YouTube was purchased by Google in 2006 for \$1.65 billion. It is a platform that hosts a variety of videos across different fields and allows users to upload and share content. YouTube has become one of the best platforms for content creators to gain visibility. Anyone can create an account and upload videos, but it requires adherence to the site’s community guidelines.

Instagram: Launched in 2010 by Facebook, Instagram is a social media platform focused on sharing photos and videos. After creating an account, users can view and interact with posts and share updates via short messages or voice notes. Instagram also includes features for live video streaming and photo editing.

TikTok: TikTok is a social platform for sharing short video clips. Especially popular among young people, users create short videos often synced to music, with editing options available. Some users also use TikTok for educational purposes or as a platform to share food recipes and other tutorials. TikTok became the most downloaded app globally in early 2018, surpassing other social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Later, TikTok acquired Musical.ly, transforming into the platform it is today.

2.3.1 The Impact of Social Media on Society:

Social media has fundamentally changed our lives, making the world feel like a small village where, through its platforms, you can reach anywhere from the East to the West. It has provided a way to spend time and pass the hours efficiently, serving as a tool for relief from the pressures of work. It is worth mentioning that social media has become an educational tool that transcends geographical boundaries, creating a platform for discussion and interaction.

We can no longer overlook its impact on the world of news, as now, through just one application, you can access all the latest information from major companies such as Microsoft, Google, Samsung, and others, all of which maintain formal accounts or pages. Moreover, social media has provided a suitable environment for businesses by offering a space for advertising and marketing, while also simplifying the process

of communication between customers and vendors. (Adil Sanjari, 2023) Social media has transformed into a vast network of social platforms, benefiting from the progress of internet technology and the decline of traditional media. After the mainstream media became disenchanted with the old methods of content distribution, social media emerged as a space for individuals to connect, share opinions, and have direct interactions with others. In this new world, the boundary between information and advertising has blurred, creating a space where people engage and contribute directly. (Shakawan Khalid, 2017)

Factors Contributing to the Increase of Political Propaganda on Social Media:

The rise of political propaganda in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is closely linked to social media. The impact of social media on the spread of political propaganda can be attributed to various factors. Some of the key reasons include:

1. **Ease of Information Spread:** Social media, due to its rapid flow of information and the high level of unrestricted freedom, makes it easy for anyone to share messages without censorship and at a rapid pace. This contributes significantly to the spread of political propaganda.
2. **Lack of Verification:** The absence of trustworthiness and the failure to verify information leads to a perfect environment for the spread of false news and misinformation, which has a significant impact on shaping an inaccurate political education.
3. **Advancement of Information and Fast Internet:** The availability of high-speed internet and the presence of anonymous and unaccountable individuals

disconnected from national and ethnic identities, plays a key role in spreading political programs and messages more quickly and effectively.

4. Ease of Access: Social media offers an easy way to access and gather information about individuals with political, artistic, and personal significance, providing an ideal platform for spreading political propaganda.

5. Absence of Parliamentary Oversight and Lack of Transparency: The absence of formal parliamentary checks and a lack of responsible and transparent figures in society have made people more reliant on social media for news and information. This leads to the widespread dissemination of propaganda in an uncontrolled manner.

6. Lack of Media Education: The absence of dedicated media education in society has led to the inability of people to distinguish between real and fake news. Consequently, as the awareness gap increases, political propaganda becomes more widespread.

7. Unemployment and Economic Struggles: The lack of job opportunities and widespread economic hardship has made social media a convenient platform for wasting time and disseminating politically charged content.

8. Targeting Vulnerable and Unaware Individuals: Social media platforms often target individuals who lack awareness and are misinformed, facilitating the spread of political propaganda. This increases fear and uncertainty among the public about the veracity of news and information.

9. Influence of Radical Ideologies: Radical ideologies, including violent and extremist political views, have infiltrated Kurdish and Iraqi social media, where they are used to instill fear and suppress ideas of liberty and free thought. This further fuels the spread of terrorist ideologies and conflicts.

10. Weak and Charismatic Figures in Politics: The lack of strong, charismatic political figures who use social media for strategic purposes, spreading misinformation and misleading narratives, contributes to the manipulation of public opinion and the spread of false information, weakening public trust in media. (Dr. Sara Talayi, 2013)

3.1 Fake News and Misinformation on Social Media

What is Fake News?

Fake news refers to news and information that is deliberately created with the intention of misleading people. It is often shared quickly across social media platforms, and its purpose can vary, such as for political, commercial, or simply for attracting attention. (Researcher)

Many of the things you read online, especially on social media feeds, may appear to be true, but often they are not. Misinformation includes stories, articles, or posts that are designed to deceive or mislead readers. Generally, these stories are created either to influence people's opinions or to align with a political agenda, or they can be used for financial gain by online platforms that spread them. Fake information can lead people to visit deceptive websites or use fake names and addresses in an attempt to create credibility (Shakawan Khalid, 2017)

The concept of “fake news” has been a prominent topic in media discussions for several years. How can we define a term that has taken on many different meanings for different people?

In the context of this content, we define “fake news” as stories that are fabricated: the content is self-constructed, without any truth or credible sources to back it up. Sometimes, these stories are used as propaganda, aimed at manipulating the reader’s perception or encouraging clicks, often with an economic motive. However, it is important to note that “fake news” is a far-reaching issue, much broader than the simple definition of the term. This concept has become politically charged, often used to discredit any opposing viewpoint. Some people even use fake news as a tool to manipulate the trust and loyalty of their audience, often targeting the media.

With the advent of technological advancements like social media, the spread of fake news has become quicker and more widespread, as people share more and more information online. This increase in online content sharing makes it easier for fake news to spread, leading to greater challenges in discerning the truth in our global information ecosystem. (Research on Fake News and Propaganda, University of Michigan)

Fake news refers to false or misleading information (disinformation); it is a type of fabricated story or information designed to mislead the audience, often for the purpose of advancing a political, business, religious, or social agenda. As Malcolm X says, “The media, in its role as a storyteller, is so powerful that it can be both a victim and a perpetrator. If left unchecked, the media can become a tool for manipulation, influencing those who are most vulnerable.” In this context, fake news

can be divided into two types:

1. **Deliberate Misinformation:** These are intentionally false stories, created in the form of written content or manipulated images, videos, and graphics. These stories are designed to mislead the public, discredit an individual, or support a commercial or political agenda.

2. **Distorted Truths:** These stories may contain elements of truth but are presented in a way that misleads or manipulates the overall message. While they may present facts, they do so in a way that omits key details or distorts the meaning. This type of fake news often aims to advance a particular ideological or political agenda. Sometimes, these stories are based on truths that are selectively omitted or exaggerated to make a specific point. (Aras Saeed – Journalism student at the College of Social Sciences, Sulaymaniyah University)

How Misinformation Spreads Through Social Media

What is Misinformation?

Misinformation refers to information that is incorrect, misleading, or intentionally fabricated to deceive or mislead people. This type of information can spread quickly, especially through social media platforms, and can have significant negative effects on individuals and society as a whole. (Researcher)

With the advancement of communication technologies, particularly the expansion and development of social media platforms, a new landscape has emerged where news and information are shared quickly and without restrictions. This environment makes it easy for people to become overwhelmed with news and information that

they may not fully understand or control, often leading them to encounter information that is manipulated or false. Within this environment, many news stories and pieces of information are inaccurate, often fabricated for political or economic purposes. Therefore, it is crucial for individuals to be well-informed and critical when encountering misinformation. This is particularly important as misinformation spreads quickly, and its negative effects on both individuals and society can be far-reaching. Today, misinformation is often spread not only through written content but also through images and audio, with social media platforms being the primary vehicles for its dissemination. This shift away from traditional media such as radio and television has made it even easier for false information to reach a broad audience.

Misinformation can appear in various forms. Sometimes it disguises itself as truth, but upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that many facts are either distorted or completely fabricated. These stories are often shared with the intent to influence public opinion or serve a specific political or economic agenda. At other times, misinformation spreads unintentionally when information is shared without verifying its accuracy, leading to further confusion and misunderstanding. (D. Ibrahim Saeed Fathola – Professor of Journalism at Sulaymaniyah University)

Technical Distinction Between Accurate Information, Inaccurate Information, and False News: Every user and media producer can more effectively distinguish between true, false, and misleading information by utilizing some key techniques for identifying the origin, timing, location, context, and purpose of news. With the continuous growth of artificial intelligence, the internet, and social media services, vast amounts of information are shared daily. However, not all of it qualifies as news,

as news and information are distinct from each other, with varying values and quality. The following techniques can help in distinguishing accurate information from false or misleading news:

1. Source of Information: According to professional journalism standards, a piece of news must have a reliable source. Information without a source is not considered news. For example, if someone says they caught a dog with a knife, this is not news unless the source can be verified and supported by further reliable documentation. If the source of information is unclear or unknown, the news should be treated with caution. Not only in Kurdistan but globally, media outlets must verify the authenticity of their sources before sharing news.

2. Timing of Information: The timing of when information is shared is critical. One must consider whether the news is timely or part of a delayed revelation. Sometimes media outlets might report outdated or recycled news as if it were new, which can mislead the public. Timely information, especially during crises or elections, can often lead to misinformation if not handled properly. Therefore, the publication date and urgency of the information must be cross-checked to verify its validity.

3. Location of Information: Misleading news often originates from websites or social media pages that lack credibility and are not associated with an established institution. These platforms usually do not provide any verifiable address or contact information. Thus, the location of where the information is published plays a role in determining its credibility. News shared from reputable, identifiable sources is usually more reliable than that coming from unknown or obscure websites.

4. **Relevance and Purpose of Information:** Every piece of news should be assessed for its relevance and the intent behind its dissemination. News that is overly sensational, or lacks a clear purpose, might be misleading or false. Often, false news is spread to serve specific agendas, such as political, social, or economic manipulation. Checking the news for its contextual relevance and possible underlying motives is crucial to determine its authenticity.

5. **Specificity of Information:** Many misleading news stories or false information tend to lack detail or precision. A lack of specificity can be a red flag, especially if the information is vague or too generalized. On the other hand, accurate news often provides detailed and verifiable information.

6. **Impact of Information:** Finally, it is essential to consider the potential impact of the news. In many cases, misleading or false information can cause harm, provoke panic, or influence public opinion in a harmful direction. Understanding the effects of a piece of news can help in assessing its validity. Media literacy training is crucial in helping people identify the difference between true and false news, enabling them to navigate the complexities of today's information-rich environment. These six techniques are essential for distinguishing between accurate and misleading information in the modern media landscape. The role of media professionals and users is to apply these methods to ensure that the information consumed is reliable and truthful. (Dr. Shwan Adam Ayes, Professor of Communication Studies)

Causes of Fake News Creation and Its Rapid Spread:

1. It works on the basis of spreading rumors.

2. It spreads quickly.
3. For news, it focuses on the sensationalism and expectations of the public.
4. Likes and shares of this type of news are more frequent, which increases the likelihood of the fake news being shared 70% more than true news. The spread of fake news happens faster than true news; while true news takes six times longer to be shared. (Dr. Nezakat Hussein, Article, in Golan Newspaper, 2020)

Consequences of Fake News:

1. Loss of trust in news and media among the public.
2. Destruction of credibility in trusted media outlets.
3. Creation of fear, anxiety, and confusion.
4. Undermining national security, social stability, and public discourse.
5. Often, it negatively impacts the economy, causing price fluctuations and instability.
6. It creates a division in public opinion, between truth and lies, between good and bad leadership.
7. Educational consequences, contributing to the creation of an uninformed public, fostering chaos, and potentially harming national unity.

Most countries have laws as a response to the spread of this type of information and

news, in conjunction with education, awareness, technical tools, and the pursuit of truth to protect the public from fake news. (Dr. Nezakat Hussein, Article, in Golan Newspaper, 2020)

2.4 Use of Social Media in Political Campaigns

How Politicians Use Social Media to Reach Audiences in Political Campaigns:

Social media has created a significant revolution in political communication, offering politicians an unprecedented opportunity to engage with voters, rally supporters, and influence public opinion. This research examines how politicians can effectively use social media to achieve their goals during political campaigns, drawing on academic research and real-world examples.

1. Identifying and Understanding Goals:

Before engaging in any social media campaign, politicians must clearly define their objectives. This involves analyzing demographic data, identifying key segments of voters, and understanding their concerns, interests, and online behaviors. Tools like Facebook Audience Insights and Twitter Analytics can provide valuable data for this purpose (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). In Kurdistan, understanding cultural and linguistic aspects of different communities is crucial for targeted engagement (Hewraman, 2021).

2. Choosing the Right Platforms:

Different social media platforms cater to distinct demographics and engagement styles. Facebook, with its broad reach, is ideal for sharing detailed information and

participating in discussions. Instagram, with its focus on visuals, is effective for showcasing key moments of a campaign and behind-the-scenes content. Twitter, known for its real-time updates and concise messaging, is suitable for quick, impactful announcements. In Kurdistan, platforms like Telegram and Snapchat, which cater to specific demographics, should also be considered (DataReportal, 2023).

3. Creating Engaging Content:

Content is king in social media campaigns. Politicians must create content that is engaging, informative, and aligned with their campaign goals. This can include:

- **Policy Positions:** Clear and concise statements on key issues using infographics, videos, and simple explanations to make complex topics accessible.
- **Campaign Innovations:** Sharing information about campaign events, volunteer opportunities, and ways to get involved.
- **Behind-the-Scenes Content:** Providing a glimpse into the personal lives of candidates to humanize them and foster a deeper connection with voters.
- **Q&A Sessions:** Engaging directly with voters through live Q&A sessions to address their concerns and build trust.
- **User-Generated Content:** Encouraging supporters to create and share campaign-related content to amplify the campaign message.

4. Building an Authentic Online Presence:

Authenticity is crucial in the digital age. Politicians must present themselves as genuine and relatable online, avoiding overly scripted or inauthentic portrayals. Sharing personal stories, engaging in sincere conversations with voters, and showing a commitment to public service can build trust and credibility (Enli, 2015).

5. Using Social Media Advertising:

Social media platforms offer powerful advertising tools that allow politicians to target specific demographics based on interests, behaviors, and location. Well-targeted ads can effectively expand a campaign's reach and amplify its message. However, transparency is critical. Politicians should clearly disclose sponsored content and adhere to ethical advertising practices to maintain trust (Campbell, 2009).

6. Monitoring and Responding to Online Sentiment:

Social media provides real-time feedback from voters. Monitoring conversations, tracking sentiment, and responding to comments and criticisms can help politicians adapt their strategies and address concerns. Tools like Brandwatch and Mention can be used to track online discussions and adjust campaign strategies accordingly (Mention, 2023).

7. Ethical Considerations and Challenges:

The use of social media in political campaigns raises several ethical issues:

- **Misinformation and Fake News:** The spread of false information can undermine democratic processes and manipulate public opinion. Politicians must ensure the accuracy of the content they share and actively combat the spread of misinformation (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).
- **Privacy Concerns:** The collection and use of voter data raise privacy issues. Politicians must be transparent about data practices and ensure they comply with privacy laws (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018).
- **Harassment and Online Abuse:** Social media can be a platform for harassment and abuse. Politicians must develop strategies to deal with online hostility and protect their supporters from cyberbullying (Brown, 2017).

Social media has become an essential tool for politicians in political campaigns. By understanding their goals, creating engaging content, establishing an authentic online presence, and using social media advertising effectively, politicians can reach broader audiences, engage with voters, and strengthen their campaigns. However, it is crucial to prioritize ethical considerations, transparency, and voter privacy to ensure the protection of public trust. In Kurdistan, applying these strategies within the context of local culture and language is vital for success in the digital age.

2.5 The Role of Social Media Influencers in Political Propaganda

The Transformative Nature of Social Media

The rise of social media has significantly altered the landscape of political communication. In the digital era, social media influencers have emerged as powerful actors with the ability to shape public discourse and mobilize political support. This analysis delves into the role of social media influencers in political propaganda, with a focus on cultural contexts, including the Kurdistan Region.

Understanding the Power of Influencers

Social media influencers are individuals who have built a substantial online following and have the ability to influence the opinions and behaviors of their audience (Brown & Hayes, 2008). Their influence is derived from several key factors:

1. **Perceived Authenticity:** Influencers are often seen as more relatable and trustworthy than traditional media or political figures (Khamis et al., 2017). This perceived authenticity enhances their credibility, making audiences more receptive to their messages.
2. **Targeted Reach:** Influencers cater to specific audiences that share common interests and values (Lipsman et al., 2012). This allows political messages to be tailored to particular demographic groups, making them more effective in mobilizing support.

3. Social Connection: Influencers establish strong emotional bonds with their followers, fostering a sense of community and trust (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). This connection can be leveraged to promote political agendas or candidates, as followers feel a sense of loyalty to the influencer and their viewpoints.

Influencers as a Propaganda Tool

Political actors have recognized the power of social media influencers to spread propaganda and shape public opinion. This can manifest itself in many ways:

Direct support: Politicians or political parties may partner with influencers to openly support their candidacy or policies (Freberg et al., 2011). This can give their campaign credibility and reach new audiences, especially younger demographics that are more likely to follow influencers.

Subtle development: Influencers may vaguely promote political messages or ideologies through their content, place issues in a particular context, or vaguely support certain points of view without explicitly demonstrating their political relevance. This can be a powerful form of persuasion, as it uses the credibility of the influencer and avoids overt political messages.

Disinformation and misinformation: Influencers may be used to spread false or misleading information, intentionally or unintentionally, to shape public perception and distort political opponents (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). This can have serious consequences for democratic processes because it can manipulate public opinion and distort the political landscape.

Astrology: This involves creating the illusion of primary support by employing influencers to advance a political agenda, masking the true source of the message (Ratkiewicz et al., 2011). This tactic can be misleading and manipulative, as it creates a false sense of organic support for a particular candidate or policy. Examples in a variety of cultures.

The use of social media in political propaganda is a global phenomenon. In the U.S., influencers played a significant role in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, and candidates actively partnered with influencers to reach young voters and gather support (Ott, 2017). In the Arab world, influential people are more involved in political activism and social movements, which use their platforms to educate people about social and political issues (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). In the Kurdistan Region, influential people have been used by political parties to promote their candidates and platforms, raising concerns about transparency and the possibility of manipulation (Salahaddin University, 2023).

Ethical Considerations

The use of social media influencers in political propaganda raises several ethical concerns:

Transparency and Disclosure: It is crucial for influencers to be transparent about their political affiliations and any financial incentives they receive for promoting political messages. This allows audiences to make informed judgments about the content they consume and helps prevent deceptive practices.

Accuracy and Fact-Checking: Influencers have a responsibility to verify the

accuracy of the information they share and avoid spreading misinformation or disinformation. Maintaining trust and ensuring that political discourse is based on factual information is essential for the integrity of democratic discussions.

Manipulation and Exploitation: Political actors should not exploit the trust and influence of social media influencers to manipulate public opinion or push harmful agendas. Such practices can undermine democratic processes and erode public trust in both influencers and political institutions.

Social media influencers hold significant power in shaping public opinion and influencing political narratives. While they can serve as valuable tools for political engagement, their involvement in propaganda raises ethical concerns. Transparency, fact-checking, and responsible behavior are crucial to ensuring that influencers contribute to a healthy and informed democratic process. In both the Kurdistan Region and beyond, media literacy and critical thinking among audiences are essential in mitigating the risks associated with influencer-driven political propaganda.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This type of research is a type of descriptive research that aims to describe phenomena and to analyze the phenomenon that the researcher is talking about. In order to access data and information, survey methods have been used, which is one of the most common methods of research in the humanities, including media research.

3.2 Data Collection

The Research Society: The research community includes all students from universities who are pursuing academic studies at different levels of college.

Research Samples: The research sample includes individuals who participated in the research and are representative of the majority of the research community, so the sample of this study includes students from the College of Arts, Medicine, Law, Language, and Engineering.

Scope of Research: Scope of Research

The field of research defines the framework of the research and sample community, which is divided into three areas, including:

- **Location:** The field of location for this study is the University of the World-Erbil, located in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

- Time Scope: The period required to collect data and information relevant to the research topic was from January 2025 to March 2025.
- Humanities: This includes all students from colleges and departments around the world.

3.3 Data Analysis

In collecting the data, a survey form was used, which consists of 100 forms and is divided into research samples consisting of students from the faculties of Arts, Medicine, Law, Language, and Engineering at the University of Erbil. The form is divided into two sections: the first part is about general research questions and consists of (5) questions, the second part consists of 20 questions divided into (4) items, the first section is (the use of social media and media content), the second section is (political propaganda and the impact of social media), the third section is about (countering political propaganda) and the fourth section is dedicated to (the effects of political propaganda on public trust and political bias).

Statistical tools used: Data analysis using SPSS

These are the statistical tools that researchers use to obtain results for the purpose of analyzing data. The researchers used the SPSS tool to analyze the statistical data of the study, which is considered to be an advanced and important system for analyzing the data

Chapter Four: Analysis and Results

Chapter Four: Analysis and Results

4.1 Presentation of Findings

1. General Information of the Study Sample

1-1: Gender Distribution of the Study Sample

Table (1): Gender Distribution of the Study Sample

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	44	56%
Female	56	56%
Total	100	100%

According to the data in Table (1), it is evident that the participants in the study include 56 individuals who identify as female, making up 56% of the study sample, ranking first. Additionally, 44 participants identify as male, constituting 44% of the study sample.

Table of number (2) sample age of the survey

Age	Number	Percentage
24-18	57	57%
34-25	31	31%
44-35	11	11%
45-54	1	1%
Total	100	%100

1-2: Age of the Research Sample

According to the university enrollment age in the Kurdistan Region, the minimum age considered is 18 years, while the maximum age in the study sample is 54 years.

A detailed examination of Table (2) shows that individuals aged between 18 and 24 years constitute 57 participants, making up 57% of the research sample, ranking first. Meanwhile, those aged between 45 and 54 years account for only one participant, representing just 1% of the sample.

Additionally, participants aged between 25 and 34 years number 31, making up 31% of the sample, ranking second. Similarly, individuals aged between 35 and 44 years constitute 11 participants, representing 11% of the research sample, ranking third.

Table of number (3) level of education of the survey participants

Academic Stage	Frequency	Percentage
First	5	5%
Second	13	13%
Third	52	52%
Fourth	21	21%
Fifth	9	9%
Total	100	100%

1-3: Education Level of the Survey Sample

As shown in Table number (3), it appears that the participants who are at the third level of education number (52) people, which constitutes (52%) of the survey sample. Those at the fourth level of education number (21) people, which makes up

(21%) of the sample. Additionally, (13%) of the survey sample is at the second education level, numbering (13) people. Participants at the fifth education level number (9) people, which constitutes (9%) of the sample, while (5) participants are at the first education level, making up (5%) of the survey sample.

Table number (4) the college where the survey sample studies

College	Frequency	Percentage
Literature and Art	20	20%
Language	20	20%
Law	20	20%
Engineering	20	20%
Medicine	20	20%
Total	100	100%

4: The College Where the Survey Sample Studies

As elaborated in Table number (4), it becomes clear that the survey participants are divided into five colleges. These colleges are: (Arts and Humanities, Languages, Law, Engineering, and Medicine). For each of these colleges, (20) forms were distributed to the survey participants, and each college represents (20%) of the survey sample.

Table number (5) The use of different social media platforms by the survey sample

Social Media platforms	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	33	19%
Instagram	48	28%
Tik tok	27	16%
Snap chat	47	27%
youtube	18	10%
Total	174	100%

5: Usage of Different Social Media Platforms by the Survey Sample

As clarified in Table (5), the majority of survey participants use the Instagram platform, with 48 individuals, making up 28% of the sample. Following that, Snapchat users come next, totaling 47 individuals, accounting for 27%. Regarding Facebook, the number of users in the survey is 33 individuals, representing 19% of the sample. The TikTok platform ranks fourth, with 27 individuals using it, making up 16%. According to the table, 18% of the survey sample uses YouTube, with a total of 17 individuals. From this, we can conclude that the majority of the survey participants primarily use Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, ranking them as the most used platforms. TikTok follows as the second most used platform among the survey participants.

2- Specific Information About the Study

First: Social Media Usage and Media Content

1- Rate of Social Media Usage

As shown in Table (6), Section (1), 52 individuals from the study sample use social media very frequently on a daily basis, ranking first with 52%. Meanwhile, 43 individuals use social media moderately every day, making up 43% of the sample, ranking second.

According to the survey, 4 individuals use social media rarely daily, accounting for 4% of the sample. Additionally, 1 participant does not use social media daily at all, representing 1%, ranking fourth.

The agreement rate for this category is 69%, with a mean score of 3.46 and a standard deviation of 0.63.

2- Exposure to Political Content on Social Media

As shown in Table (6), Section (2), 40 individuals from the study sample are moderately exposed to political content on social media, making up 40% of the sample and ranking first. Meanwhile, 30 individuals are highly exposed to political content, accounting for 30%, ranking second.

According to the survey, 23 individuals are slightly exposed to political content, representing 23% of the sample. Additionally, 7 participants report no exposure to political content, making up 7%, ranking fourth.

The agreement rate for this category is 59%, with a mean score of 2.93 and a standard deviation of 0.90.

3- Engagement with Political Posts

As shown in Table (6), Section (3), 34 individuals from the study sample do not interact at all with political posts on social media, ranking first with 34%. Meanwhile, 29 individuals rarely engage with political posts, representing 29%, ranking second.

According to the survey, 20 individuals moderately engage with political posts, making up 20% of the sample. Additionally, 17 participants frequently engage with political posts, accounting for 17%, ranking fourth.

The agreement rate for this category is 44%, with a mean score of 2.20 and a standard deviation of 1.09.

4- Influence of Political Content on Political Opinions

As shown in Table (6), Section (4), 45 individuals from the study sample believe that political content has a moderate impact on their political views, making up 45% of the sample and ranking first. Meanwhile, 22 individuals believe political content has a slight influence on their views, representing 22%, ranking second.

According to the survey, 20 individuals believe political content has no impact on their political opinions, making up 20% of the sample. Additionally, 13 participants believe political content has a strong influence on their political opinions, accounting for 13%, ranking fourth.

The agreement rate for this category is 50%, with a mean score of 2.51 and a standard deviation of 0.96.

5- Increase in Political Content on Social Media During Elections

As shown in Table (6), Section (5), 52 individuals from the study sample strongly noticed an increase in political content on social media during election campaigns, making up 52% of the sample and ranking first. Meanwhile, 32 individuals moderately noticed an increase, representing 32%, ranking second.

According to the survey, 9 individuals did not notice an increase in political content during elections, making up 9% of the sample. Additionally, 7 participants slightly noticed an increase in political content, accounting for 7%, ranking fourth.

The agreement rate for this category is 65%, with a mean score of 3.27 and a standard deviation of 0.94

Table (6): Social Media Usage and Media Content

Items	None		Little		Some to extent		A lot		Mean	Std Deviation	Agreement
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
How many times a day do you use social media?	1	1.0%	4	4.0%	33	43.0%	52	52.0%	3.46	0.63	69%
To what extent are you exposed to political content on social media?	7	7.0%	23	23.0%	40	40.0%	30	30.0%	2.93	0.90	56%
I interact (like, comment, share) with posts that contain political content	34	34.0%	29	29.0%	20	20.0%	17	17.0%	2.20	1.09	44%
Political content influences my opinions on political matters	20	20.0%	22	22.0%	45	45.0%	13	13.0%	2.51	0.96	50%
I have noticed that during election campaigns, posts with political content increase.	9	9.0%	7	7.0%	32	32.0%	52	52.0%	3.27	0.94	65%
Total									2.87	0.90	57%

Second: Political Propaganda and the Impact of Social Media

6- The Role of Social Media in Increasing Political Propaganda

According to Table 7 and Term 6, the survey data shows that 60 respondents (60%) strongly agreed that social media plays a major role in increasing political propaganda, ranking this opinion in first place. Additionally, 31 participants (31%) agreed to some extent, placing this opinion in second place. On the other hand, 5

participants (5%) completely disagreed that social media contributes to the spread of political propaganda. Furthermore, 4 participants (4%) slightly agreed, ranking this view in fourth place. The overall agreement rate is 69%, with a mean value of 3.46 and a standard deviation of 0.80.

7- Using Social Media to Manipulate Public Opinion Based on Table 7 and Term 7, the survey reveals that 46 respondents (46%) agreed to some extent that social media is used to manipulate public opinion in the Kurdistan Region, placing this view in first place. Moreover, 42 participants (42%) strongly agreed with this statement, ranking it second.

Meanwhile, 10 respondents (10%) slightly agreed, and 2 participants (2%) completely disagreed with the claim that social media is used to manipulate public opinion in Kurdistan, placing these views in third and fourth place, respectively. The

overall agreement rate is 66%, with a mean value of 3.28 and a standard deviation of 0.73.

8- Intentional Political Propaganda by Political Groups on Social Media According to Table 7 and Term 8, 43 respondents (43%) agreed to some extent that political groups deliberately spread political propaganda through social media, ranking this opinion in first place. Similarly, 41 participants (41%) strongly agreed, placing it second. Meanwhile, 13 respondents (13%) slightly agreed, and 3 participants (3%) completely disagreed with this claim, ranking third and fourth, respectively. The overall agreement rate is 64%, with a mean value of 3.22 and a standard deviation of 0.79.

9- Social Media as a More Dangerous Platform for Political Propaganda

Based on Table 7 and Term 9, 49 respondents (49%) strongly agreed that political propaganda spread through social media is more dangerous than in other media formats, ranking this opinion first. Additionally, 33 participants (33%) agreed to some extent, placing it second. In contrast, 13 respondents (13%) slightly agreed, while 5 participants (5%) completely disagreed, ranking third and fourth,

respectively. The overall agreement rate is 65%, with a mean value of 3.26 and a standard deviation of 0.87.

10- The Role of Kurdish Media Outlets in Spreading Political Propaganda on Social Media According to Table 7 and Term 10, 43 respondents (43%) strongly agreed that Kurdish media outlets participate in spreading political propaganda through social media, ranking this opinion in first place. Furthermore, 39 participants (39%) agreed to some extent, placing it second. Meanwhile, 11 respondents (11%) slightly agreed, and 7 participants (7%) completely disagreed with the claim, ranking third and fourth, respectively. The overall agreement rate is 64%, with a mean value of 3.18 and a standard deviation of 0.89

Table 7 Political Propaganda and the Impact of Social Media

Items	None		Little		Some to extent		A lot		Mean	Std Deviation	Agreement
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Social media plays a role in the rise of political propaganda in the Kurdistan Region	5	5.0%	4	4.0%	31	31.0%	60	60.0%	3.46	0.80	69%
To what extent do you think social media is being used to manipulate public opinion in the Kurdistan Region?	2	2.0%	10	10.0%	46	46.0%	42	42.0%	3.28	0.73	66%
Political groups deliberately use social media to spread .propaganda	3	3.0%	13	13.0%	43	43.0%	41	41.0%	3.22	0.79	64%
Spreading propaganda on social media is more dangerous than other forms of media (TV, .radio, newspapers)	5	5.0%	13	13.0%	33	33.0%	49	49.0%	3.26	0.87	65%
Kurdish media outlets are involved in spreading political .propaganda on social media	7	7.0%	11	11.0%	39	39.0%	43	43.0%	3.18	0.89	64%
Total									3.28	0.81	66%

Third: Rejection of Political Propaganda

11- Rejection of Political Propaganda on Social Media

In Table 8 and Definition 11, it is evident that (40) participants of the survey strongly believe that political propaganda should be entirely rejected on social media, making up (40%) of the respondents. At the same time, (40) individuals (in a neutral stance)

also agree that political propaganda should be completely rejected on social media, which accounts for (40%) and places them in the first level. According to the survey, (14) individuals believe, to a lesser extent, that political propaganda should be completely rejected on social media, making up (14%) of the sample.

Additionally, (6) participants did not show any opinion on whether political propaganda should be entirely rejected on social media, representing (6%) and placing them in the fourth level. The degree of agreement stands at (63%), with the mean of this segment being (3.14), and the standard deviation is (0.88).

12- Trust in Social Media Platforms for Identifying and Removing Political Propaganda

In Table 8 and Definition 12, it is shown that (43) respondents (in a neutral stance) trust social media platforms for identifying and removing political propaganda, accounting for (43%) of the respondents. At the same time, (27) individuals (in a lesser extent) trust social media platforms for this purpose, making up (27%) and placing them in the second level. According to the survey, (19) participants have strong trust in social media platforms for identifying and removing political propaganda, representing (19%) of the sample. Additionally, (11) participants did not trust social media platforms for this purpose, representing (11%) and placing them in the fourth level. The degree of agreement is (54%), with the mean of this segment being (2.70), and the standard deviation is (0.90).

13- Use of Fact-Checking Websites for Verifying Political Content on Social Media

In Table 8 and Definition 13, it is indicated that (35) participants (in a neutral stance) use fact-checking websites to verify political content on social media, accounting for (35%) of the sample. At the same time, (23) individuals (strongly) use fact-checking websites for verifying political content, making up (23%) and placing them in the second level. According to the survey, (22) participants use fact-checking websites to a lesser extent, representing (22%) of the sample. Additionally, (20) participants do not use fact-checking websites for verifying political content on social media, representing (20%) and placing them in the fourth level. The degree of agreement is (52%), with the mean of this segment being (2.62), and the standard deviation is (1.05).

14- The Ability of Kurdish Media to Influence Political Propaganda

In Table 8 and Definition 14, it is shown that (50) respondents (in a neutral stance) believe that Kurdish media has the ability to influence political propaganda, accounting for (50%) of the sample. At the same time, (23) individuals (in a lesser extent) believe that Kurdish media has the ability to influence political propaganda, making up (23%) and placing them in the second level. According to the survey, (17) participants strongly believe in the ability of Kurdish media to influence political propaganda, representing (17%) of the sample. Additionally, (10) participants do not believe in the ability of Kurdish media to influence political propaganda, representing (10%) and placing them in the fourth level. The degree of agreement is (55%), with the mean of this segment being (2.74), and the standard deviation is (0.86).

15- The Importance of Media Education in Influencing Political Propaganda

In Table 8 and Definition 15, it is evident that (48) participants (strongly) believe that media education is crucial for influencing political propaganda, accounting for (48%) of the respondents. At the same time, (35) individuals (in a neutral stance) believe media education is important for influencing political propaganda, making up (35%) and placing them in the second level. According to the survey, (11) participants believe to a lesser extent that media education is important for influencing political propaganda, representing (11%) of the sample. Additionally, (6) participants do not believe media education is important for influencing political propaganda, representing (6%) and placing them in the fourth level. The degree of agreement is (65%), with the mean of this segment being (3.25), and the standard deviation is (0.88).

Table Number (8): Rejection of Political Propaganda

Items	None		Little		Some to extent		A lot		Mean	Std Deviation	Agreement
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
How many people believe that political propaganda can be completely removed from social media?	6	6.0%	14	14.0%	40	40.0%	40	40.0%	3.14	0.88	63%
How many people trust social media platforms to identify and remove political propaganda?	11	11.0%	27	27.0%	43	43.0%	19	19.0%	2.79	0.90	54%
How many people use fact-checking websites to verify political content on social media?	20	20.0%	22	22.0%	35	35.0%	23	23.0%	2.61	1.05	52%
To what extent do you think Kurdish media can counter political propaganda?	10	10.0%	23	23.0%	50	50.0%	17	17.0%	2.74	0.86	55%
To what extent do you think media education is important in countering political propaganda?	6	6.0%	11	11.0%	35	35.0%	48	48.0%	3.25	0.88	65%
Total									2.89	0.91	58%

Fourth: The Effects of Political Propaganda on Public Trust and Political Alignment

16- Trust in Political Content on Social Media

Table (9) and variable (16) indicate that (31) participants (a moderate proportion) trust political content on social media, making up (31%) of the sample, ranking first. Additionally, (30) participants highly trust political content on social media, comprising (30%) of the sample, ranking second.

According to the survey, (24) participants have little trust in political content on social media, representing (24%) of the sample. Furthermore, (15) participants have no trust at all in political content on social media, making up (15%) of the sample, ranking fourth. The agreement rate for this factor is (55%), with a mean score of (2.76) and a standard deviation of (1.05).

17- Increase in Polarization and Disagreement Due to Political Propaganda

Table (9) and variable (17) indicate that (42) participants (a moderate proportion) believe that political propaganda has contributed to an increase in polarization and disagreement, accounting for (42%) of the sample, ranking first. Additionally, (41) participants strongly believe that political propaganda has increased polarization and disagreement, making up (41%) of the sample, ranking second.

According to the survey, (13) participants believe to a small extent that political propaganda has increased polarization and disagreement, representing (13%) of the sample. Moreover, (4) participants do not believe at all that political propaganda has contributed to an increase in polarization and disagreement, making up (4%) of the sample, ranking fourth.

The agreement rate for this factor is (64%), with a mean score of (3.20) and a standard deviation of (0.82).

18- The Impact of Spreading Fake News and Misinformation on Election Outcomes

Table (9) and variable (18) indicate that (40) participants (a moderate proportion) believe that spreading fake news and misinformation affects election outcomes, representing (40%) of the sample, ranking first. Additionally, (35) participants strongly believe that fake news and misinformation impact election results, making up (35%) of the sample, ranking second.

According to the survey, (19) participants believe to a small extent that spreading fake news and misinformation affects election outcomes, accounting for (19%) of the sample. Furthermore, (6) participants do not believe at all that fake news and misinformation influence election outcomes, making up (6%) of the sample, ranking fourth. The agreement rate for this factor is (61%), with a mean score of (3.04) and a standard deviation of (0.89).

19- The Effect of Political Propaganda on Individuals' Political Opinions

Table (9) and variable (19) indicate that (52) participants (a moderate proportion) believe that political propaganda influences individuals' political opinions, accounting for (52%) of the sample, ranking first. Additionally, (24) participants strongly believe that political propaganda affects personal political perspectives, making up (24%) of the sample, ranking second.

According to the survey, (19) participants believe to a small extent that political propaganda impacts individuals' political views, representing (19%) of the sample.

Furthermore, (5) participants do not believe at all that political propaganda has any effect on individuals' political opinions, making up (5%) of the sample, ranking fourth. The agreement rate for this factor is (59%), with a mean score of (2.95) and a standard deviation of (0.80).

20- The Role of Political Propaganda in Increasing Social Divisions

Table (9) and variable (20) indicate that (42) participants strongly believe that political propaganda contributes to social division in the Kurdistan Region, making up (42%) of the sample, ranking first. Additionally, (42) participants (a moderate proportion) believe that political propaganda plays a role in increasing social divisions in the Kurdistan Region, representing (42%) of the sample, ranking second.

According to the survey, (10) participants believe to a small extent that political propaganda contributes to social divisions, making up (10%) of the sample.

Furthermore, (6) participants do not believe at all that political propaganda plays a role in increasing social divisions, accounting for (6%) of the sample, ranking fourth. The agreement rate for this factor is (64%), with a mean score of (3.20) and a standard deviation of (0.85).

Table (9): The Effects of Political Propaganda on Public Trust and Political Alignment

Items	None		Litu		Some to extent		A lot		Mean	Std Deviatio	Agreement
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
To what extent do you trust political content on social media?	15	15.0%	24	24.0%	31	31.0%	30	30.0%	2.76	1.05	55%
To what extent do you think political propaganda has increased division and political discord in the Kurdistan Region?	4	4.0%	13	13.0%	42	42.0%	41	41.0%	3.20	0.82	64%
To what extent do you think the spread of misinformation and fake news on social media affects the outcome of elections in Kurdistan?	6	6.0%	19	19.0%	40	40.0%	35	35.0%	0.04	0.89	61%
To what extent does political propaganda on social media influence individuals' political opinions?	5	5.0%	19	19.0%	52	52.0%	24	24.0%	2.95	0.80	59%
Political propaganda on social media has contributed to the increase of social division in Kurdistan.	6	6.0%	10	10.0%	42	42.0%	42	42.0%	3.20	0.85	64%
Total									3.03	0.88	61%

3. Testing hypotheses

Item number (10) is the comparison of the statistical analysis center of each sample with the statistical analysis center (2.5)					
hypothese	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-test	Value The possibility of
The use of social media and social media content	100	2.874	0.523	7.149	0.000**
Political Propaganda and Social Media Influence	100	3.280	0.545	14.304	0.000**
The Challenge of Political Propaganda	100	2.288	0.586	6.618	0.000**
The Effects of Political Propaganda on Public Trust and Political Biases	100	3.030	0.486	10.904	0.000**
The Impact of Social Media on the Rise of Political Propaganda	100	3.018	0.386	13.430	0.000**

Comparison of Statistical Analysis Center of Social Media Usage and Media Content with Statistical Analysis Center of Impact:

Based on Table (10), the total number of research samples is (100). In terms of social media usage and media content, the statistical mean is (2.874) with a standard deviation of (0.523) and the t-test value is (7.149), along with a significance value

of (0.000), which is lower than the significance level of (0.05). Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between the statistical analysis center of social media usage and media content and the statistical analysis center of impact.

Comparison of Statistical Analysis Center of Political Propaganda and Social Media Influence with Statistical Analysis Center of Impact:

Based on Table (10), the total number of research samples is (100). In terms of political propaganda and social media influence, the statistical mean is (3.280) with a standard deviation of (0.545) and the t-test value is (14.304), with a significance value of (0.000), which is lower than the significance level of (0.05). Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between the statistical analysis center of political propaganda and social media influence and the statistical analysis center of impact.

Comparison of Statistical Analysis Center of Political Propaganda Resistance with Statistical Analysis Center of Impact:

Based on Table (10), the total number of research samples is (100). In terms of political propaganda resistance, the statistical mean is (2.888) with a standard deviation of (0.586) and the t-test value is (6.618), with a significance value of (0.000), which is lower than the significance level of (0.05). Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between the statistical analysis center of political propaganda resistance and the statistical analysis center of impact.

Comparison of Statistical Analysis Center of Political Propaganda Influence on Public Trust and Political Orientation with Statistical Analysis Center of Impact:

Based on Table (10), the total number of research samples is (100). In terms of political propaganda influence on public trust and political orientation, the statistical mean is (3.030) with a standard deviation of (0.486) and the t-test value is (10.904), with a significance value of (0.000), which is lower than the significance level of (0.05). Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between the statistical analysis center of political propaganda influence on public trust and political orientation and the statistical analysis center of impact.

Comparison of Statistical Analysis Center of Social Media Influence on Increased Political Propaganda with Statistical Analysis Center of Impact:

Based on Table (10), the total number of research samples is (100). In terms of social media influence on increased political propaganda, the statistical mean is (3.018) with a standard deviation of (0.386) and the t-test value is (13.430), with a significance value of (0.000), which is lower than the significance level of (0.05). Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between the statistical analysis center of social media influence on increased political propaganda and the statistical analysis center of impact.

Chapter: Five: Conclusion

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1 Conclusions

1. According to the data, Instagram is the most widely used platform among the research participants.
2. 52% of the participants use social media on a daily basis.
3. Most of the participants, about 40%, are exposed to political content on social media.
4. According to the findings, most participants do not engage with posts that contain political content, with 40% of the participants responding.
5. 45% of the participants believe that exposure to political content on social media has influenced their political opinions.
6. Most participants believe that during election campaigns, posts with political content increase significantly, with 52% of participants agreeing.
7. The majority of participants, about 60%, believe that social media has played a role in the increase of political propaganda in the Kurdistan Region.
8. According to the data, 46% of participants believe that social media is used to manipulate public opinion in the Kurdistan Region.
9. Most participants, about 43%, believe that political groups use social media for spreading propaganda.

10. Most participants believe that political propaganda on social media is more dangerous compared to other media forms (television, radio, newspapers).
11. According to the findings, the majority of participants, about 43%, trust that social media platforms can effectively highlight and spread political propaganda.
12. 35% of the participants rely on websites that verify facts to ensure the accuracy of political content.
13. Most participants, about 50%, believe that Kurdish media can counter political propaganda.
14. The data reveals that most participants believe media education is important to counter political propaganda.
15. Most participants, about 31%, trust the political content found on social media.
16. Most participants believe that political propaganda has led to political polarization and discord in the Kurdistan Region.
17. Most participants believe that the spread of fake news and misinformation affects the outcome of elections.
18. According to the data, the majority of participants believe that political propaganda has influenced individuals' political opinions.
19. Most participants, about 42%, believe that political propaganda on social media has contributed to the increase of social division in the Kurdistan Region.

B- Results of the analysis

At the conclusion of the analysis, the following results were reached:

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the average score of social media usage and media content with the average score of political orientation.
2. There is a statistically significant difference between the political propaganda and the impact of social media activity with the average score of political orientation.
3. There is a statistically significant difference between the average score of the rejection of political propaganda and the average score of political orientation.
4. There is a statistically significant difference between the average score of social media's impact on public trust and political perspectives with the average score of political orientation.
5. There is a statistically significant difference between the effect of social media on the increase of political propaganda and the average score of political orientation.

5.2 Recommendations

At the conclusion of the results reached by the researchers, the following suggestions and recommendations were proposed:

1. Implementing a program and campaign for media literacy to assist social media users in critically analyzing political content and propaganda.
2. Engaging universities, schools, and educational centers to unify media literacy courses that emphasize identifying false information and political propaganda.
3. Encouraging collaboration between political leaders and social media companies to ensure transparency in political advertising.
4. Promoting the use of websites and tools that verify the accuracy of political content before it is shared.
5. Independent organizations should be empowered to monitor and report on social media activities that influence election outcomes.
6. Establishing a platform for real-time fact-checking and public reporting of misinformation or political manipulation.
7. Enhancing training programs for journalists and media professionals to recognize and avoid spreading political misinformation.
8. Encouraging social media platforms to implement stricter policies on the dissemination of politically motivated fake news, ensuring accountability for content creators.

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Appendix

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

University of Kurdistan – Hewler

College of Arts and Humanities - Department of Communication

Survey Form



Dear Respondent,

This form is one of the requirements for completing a scientific research titled “The Impact of Social Media on the Increase of Political Propaganda in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.” It is part of the requirements for obtaining a Bachelor’s degree in the Department of Communication. The purpose of this research is to investigate and analyze the impact of social media on the rise of political propaganda in the Kurdistan region.

Your responses will remain confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this research. We ask that you answer the questions truthfully and accurately. Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.

Note: 1. It is necessary to write your name and date.

2. Please indicate your response by checking the appropriate box for each question.

Researchers:

Mahideen Yaseen Rasul

Zinar Nizat Mahmood

Dilwan Hassan Hussein

Fresat Shukri Tahe

General Questions

Supervisor:

M.r Ahmed Jamal Hamakir

1. Age:

☐ 18–24 ☐ 25–34 ☐ 35–44 ☐ 45–54

2. Gender:

☐ Male ☐ Female

3. Academic Stage:

☐ First Stage ☐ Second Stage ☐ Third Stage ☐ Fourth Stage

☐ Fifth Stage

4. Which college are you studying at?

☐ Arts and Humanities ☐ Languages ☐ Law ☐ Medicine ☐ Engineering

Which social media platform do you use most? (You can select more than one platform)

☐ Facebook ☐ Instagram ☐ TikTok ☐ Snapchat ☐ YouTube

☐ Other platform

Research-Specific Questions

First: Use of Social Media and Media Content

Phrases	A-lot	To some extent	Little	None	N
How many times a day do you use social media?					1
How much do you get involved in social media?					2

I interact (likes, comments, shares) with posts that have political content					3
Political content influences my views on political issues					4
I have noticed that during the election campaign, the number of posts with political content increase					5

Second: Political Propaganda and the Influence of Social Media

Phrases	A-lot	To some extent	Little	None	N
Social media plays a role in the rise of political propaganda in the Kurdistan Region					6
To what extent do you think social media is being used to manipulate public opinion in the Kurdistan Region?					7
Political groups deliberately use social media to spread propaganda					8
Spreading propaganda on social media is more dangerous than other forms of media (TV, radio, newspapers)					9

Kurdish media outlets are involved in spreading political propaganda on social media					10
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Thirdly, the fight against political propaganda

Phrases	A-lot	To some extent	Little	None	N
To what extent do you think political propaganda can be completely eliminated from social media?					11
How much do you trust social media platforms to identify and remove political propaganda?					12
How much do you use fact-checking websites to verify political content?					13
To what extent do you think the Kurdish media can counter political propaganda?					14
To what extent do you think media education is important in countering political propaganda?					15

Fourth: The Effects of Political Propaganda on Public Confidence and Political Biases

Phrases	A-lot	To some extent	Little	None	N
How much do you trust the political content on social media?					16
To what extent do you think political propaganda has increased political divisions and discord in the Kurdistan Region?					17
How much do you think that the information of spreading false information and fake news in social media will affect the outcome of the election in Kurdistan					18
To what extent does political propaganda on social media affect personal political opinions?					19
Political propaganda on social media has contributed to the increase in social division in Kurdistan					20